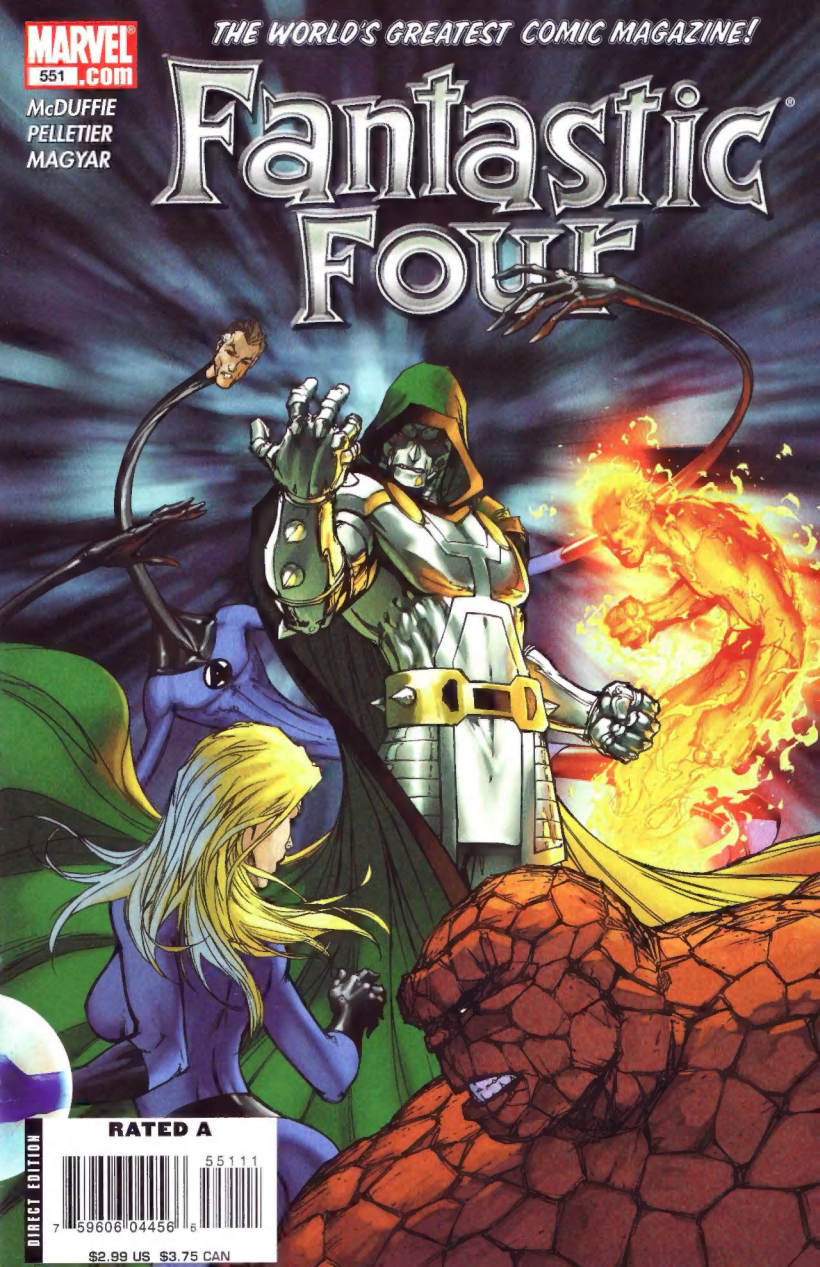
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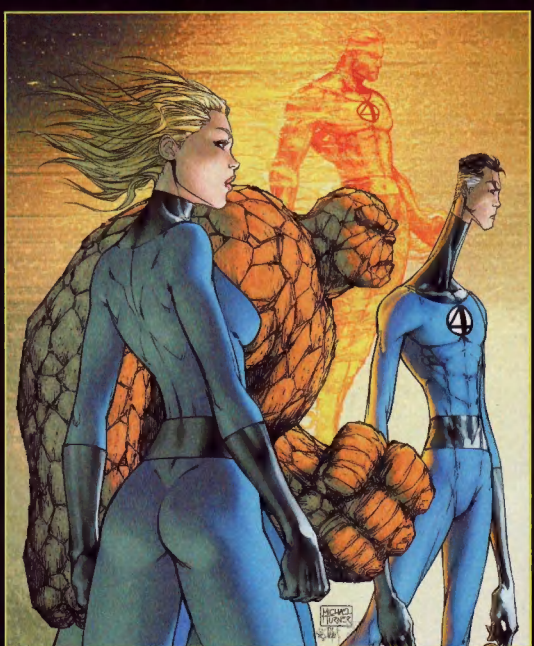
Fantastic Four

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER ONE

"THE BEGINNING OF THE END"



After the superhuman civil war drove them apart and Reed and Sue Richards took a temporary leave of absence to work on their marriage, the Fantastic Four is back together. But how long can things stay business-as-usual for our intrepid imaginauts?

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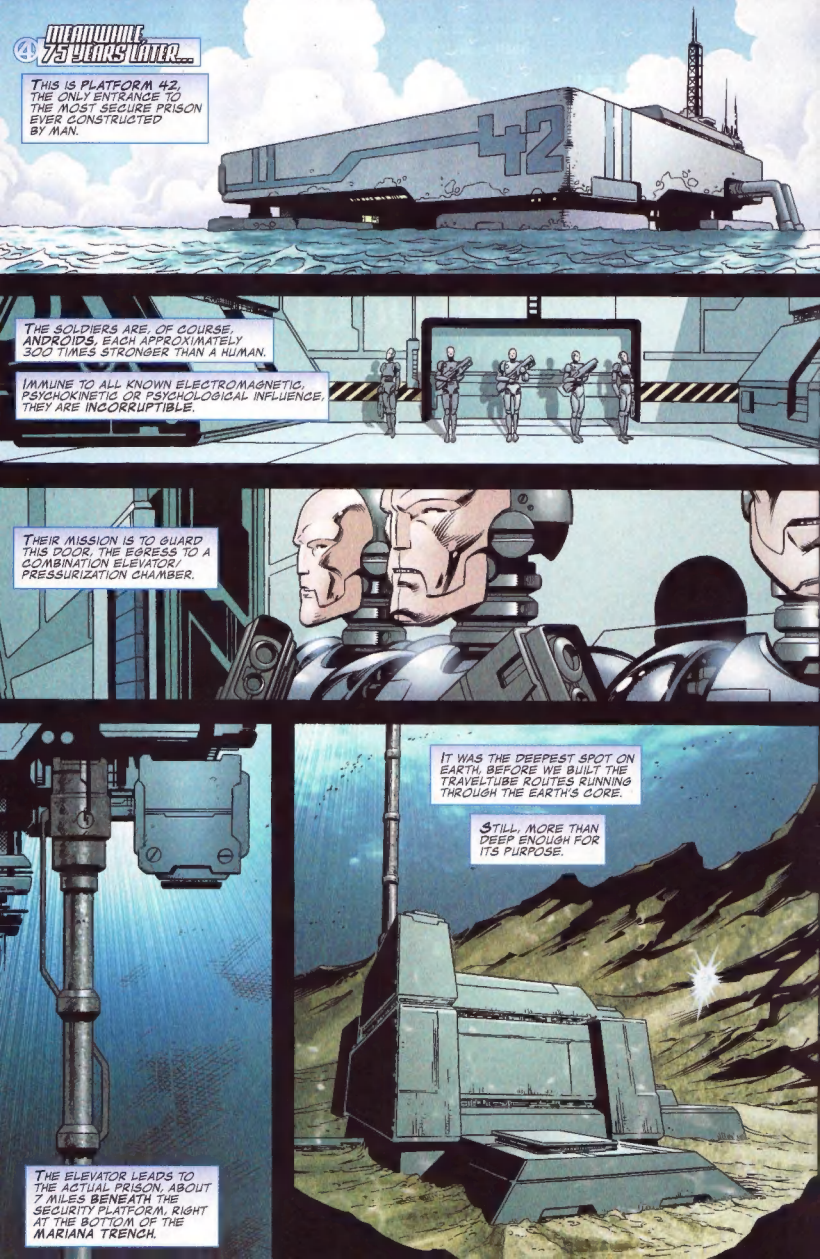
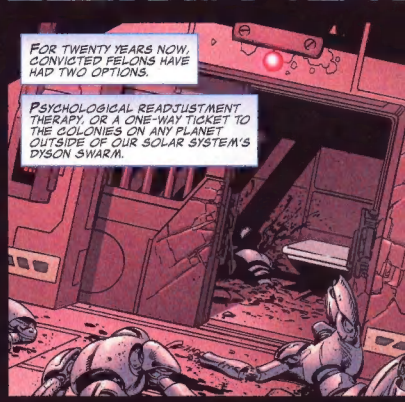

MEANWHILE, 75 YEARS LATER...
THIS IS PLATFORM 42, THE ONLY ENTRANCE TO THE MOST SECURE PRISON EVER CONSTRUCTED BY MAN.
42
THE SOLDIERS ARE, OF COURSE, ANDROIDS, EACH APPROXIMATELY 300 TIMES STRONGER THAN A HUMAN.
IMMUNE TO ALL KNOWN ELECTROMAGNETIC, PSYCHOKINETIC OR PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCE, THEY ARE INCORRUPTIBLE.
THEIR MISSION IS TO GUARD THIS DOOR, THE EGRESS TO A COMBINATION ELEVATOR/ PRESSURIZATION CHAMBER.
THE ELEVATOR LEADS TO THE ACTUAL PRISON, ABOUT 7 MILES BENEATH THE SECURITY PLATFORM, RIGHT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE MARIANA TRENCH.
IT WAS THE DEEPEST SPOT ON EARTH, BEFORE WE BUILT THE TRAVELTUBE ROUTES RUNNING THROUGH THE EARTH'S CORE.
STILL, MORE THAN DEEP ENOUGH FOR ITS PURPOSE.

ANYONE WHO SOMEHOW MANAGED TO BREAK OUT WOULD FIND HIMSELF AT THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN FLOOR.

THE FORCE EXERTED BY THE WATER HERE IS OVER 1000 TIMES THE ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE AT SEA LEVEL.
AN ESCAPEE WOULD INSTANTLY BE CRUSHED INTO ORGANIC PASTE.

SINCE THE INFORMATION REVOLUTION, THE NEED FOR PRISONS HAS DROPPED DRAMATICALLY.
PRISON 42 IS, IN FACT, THE ONLY ONE STILL IN OPERATION.


FOR TWENTY YEARS NOW, CONVICTED FELONS HAVE HAD TWO OPTIONS.
PSYCHOLOGICAL READJUSTMENT THERAPY, OR A ONE-WAY TICKET TO THE COLONIES ON ANY PLANET OUTSIDE OF OUR SOLAR SYSTEM'S DYSON SWARM.

THERE ARE CURRENTLY ONLY SIX PEOPLE INCARCERATED HERE.

MAKE THAT FIVE.
:SKWAW: EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION :FZZZZ: TO DR. RICHARDS!

PRISONER NUMBER ONE HAS ESCAPED :FZZZZZ: REPEAT, DR. DOOM HAS--
NO NEED TO REPEAT YOURSELF.
I DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY WHEN IT WOULD HAPPEN, BUT I REMEMBER IT WELL.

EPILOGUE, CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

DWAYNE McDUFFIE WRITER	PAUL PELLETIER PENCILER	RICK MAGYAR INKER	WIL QUINTANA COLORIST	VC'S RUS WOOTON LETTERER	MOLLY LAZER ASST. EDITOR	TOM BREVOORT EDITOR	JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF	DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER

MEANWHILE, 75 YEARS EARLIER...
THE BAXTER BUILDING, MANHATTAN.
WAS TODAY A GREAT DAY OR WHAT?
WHO'DA THUNK DIABLO WOULD TAKE ANOTHER RUN AT US?
HE MORE THAN TOOK A "RUN." HIS NEWFOUND MASTERY OF THE ODIC FORCE WAS NEARLY MORE THAN WE COULD HANDLE.
PLEASE. WE'RE THE FREAKIN' FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR! THERE'S NUTHIN' WE CAN'T HANDLE.
I'M WITH THE BIG GUY ON THIS ONE. THE BAND'S BACK TOGETHER. CELEBRATE OUR COOL!
WHEN HE'S RIGHT, HE'S RIGHT.
REED WAS CALCULATING, SUE WAS SHIELDING, BEN WAS CLOBBERING, AND I WAS ON FIRE!
I THINK I ACTUALLY PREFER WHEN THEY'RE BICKERING.
IT CAN'T LAST. IT NEVER DOES.

IT'S JUST LIKE OLD TIMES, MATCHSTICK. A TRIP TO ANOTHER WORLD, A FIGHT WITH A SUPER-VILLAIN LOOKIN' FER REVENGE--
WHAT DO YOU THINK IT IS, ADRENALINE?
SURE. VICTORY HIGH.
BREEBREEBREEBREE
--AND TA TOP IT ALL OFF, WE COME HOME TO AN INTRUDER ALERT.
YEAH, JUST LIKE OLD TIMES, ALL RIGHT...
WHOEVER IT IS, HE GOT IN THROUGH THE LAB. SUE? CHECK ON--
--ALICIA AND THE KIDS. ON MY WAY.
THESE READINGS INDICATE A TEMPORAL INCURSION. BE READY FOR ANYTHING.
INCLUDING NOTHING IN PARTICULAR?

THOOM!!!
MOMMY!
WE'VE GOT COMPANY, UNCA BEN!
YEAH, KID. I KINDA GOT THAT.
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, BENJAMIN. AND YOU TOO, SUSAN. YOU LOOK EVERY BIT AS LOVELY AS YOU DID IN MY MEMORY.
YEAH? YOU LOOK LIKE HELL, NAMOR.
NOT WHEN YOU CONSIDER HIS AGE--

ARE YOU FROM TWENTY YEARS IN THE FUTURE, T'CHALLA? THIRTY?
MORE THAN TWICE AS FAR AS THAT, REED. THIS IS COMPLICATED. PERHAPS WE SHOULD ALL SIT DOWN.
YOU SHOULD TAKE HIS ADVICE, RICHARDS. HE'S TRYING TO PREPARE YOU FOR MY ARRIVAL.
AND YET, HOW CAN ONE POSSIBLY BE PREPARED FOR THE HONOR OF MY PRESENCE?
DOOM!

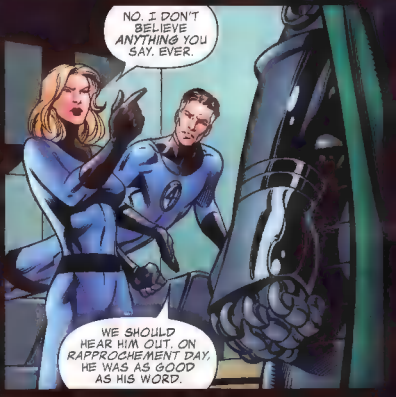
I DON'T EVEN CARE WHAT YOU WANT, I'M GONNA--
SSSHHHRRRAKKKK
ARRRRRR!
NEVER PRESUME TO LAY HANDS ON ME AGAIN, BRUTE.
GIMME TEN SECONDS TA CATCH MY BREATH AN'--
DON'T. IT'S A KINETIC INVERSION FIELD. I'VE BEEN EXPERIMENTING WITH THE CONCEPT, BUT THIS IS DECADES AHEAD OF ANYTHING ANYONE'S EVER...
OF COURSE.
WHAT YEAR WILL I INVENT THIS?

VERY GOOD, RICHARDS. I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN HOW BRILLIANT YOU WERE, BEFORE THE... UNPLEASANTNESS.
MY FORCE FIELD IS BASED, EVER SO SLIGHTLY, ON ONE OF YOUR FORTHCOMING INVENTIONS. OBVIOUSLY MUCH IMPROVED BY MY OWN SUPERIOR INTELLECT.
BUT AS YOU HAVE SURMISED, I HAVE TRAVELED HERE FROM YOUR FUTURE.
LONG TRIP FOR A BARBEQUE.
JOHNNY, WAIT--
--DOOM KNEW YOU HAD NO REASON TO TRUST HIM. NAMOR AND I CAME TO HELP CONVINCE YOU.
CONVINCE US OF WHAT?

THIS WILL BE DIFFICULT, SUSAN.
PERHAPS ALICIA SHOULD TAKE THE CHILDREN TO ANOTHER ROOM?

DO AS HE SAYS, ALICIA. I'LL BE DOWN AS SOON AS I CAN.
C'MON, KIDS. YOU HEARD YOUR MOTHER.
BYE-BYE, 'CHALLA!

MAKE IT GOOD, NAMOR. TELL ME WHY I SHOULD ALLOW DOOM IN MY HOME.
MY MISSION IS OF THE GREATEST--

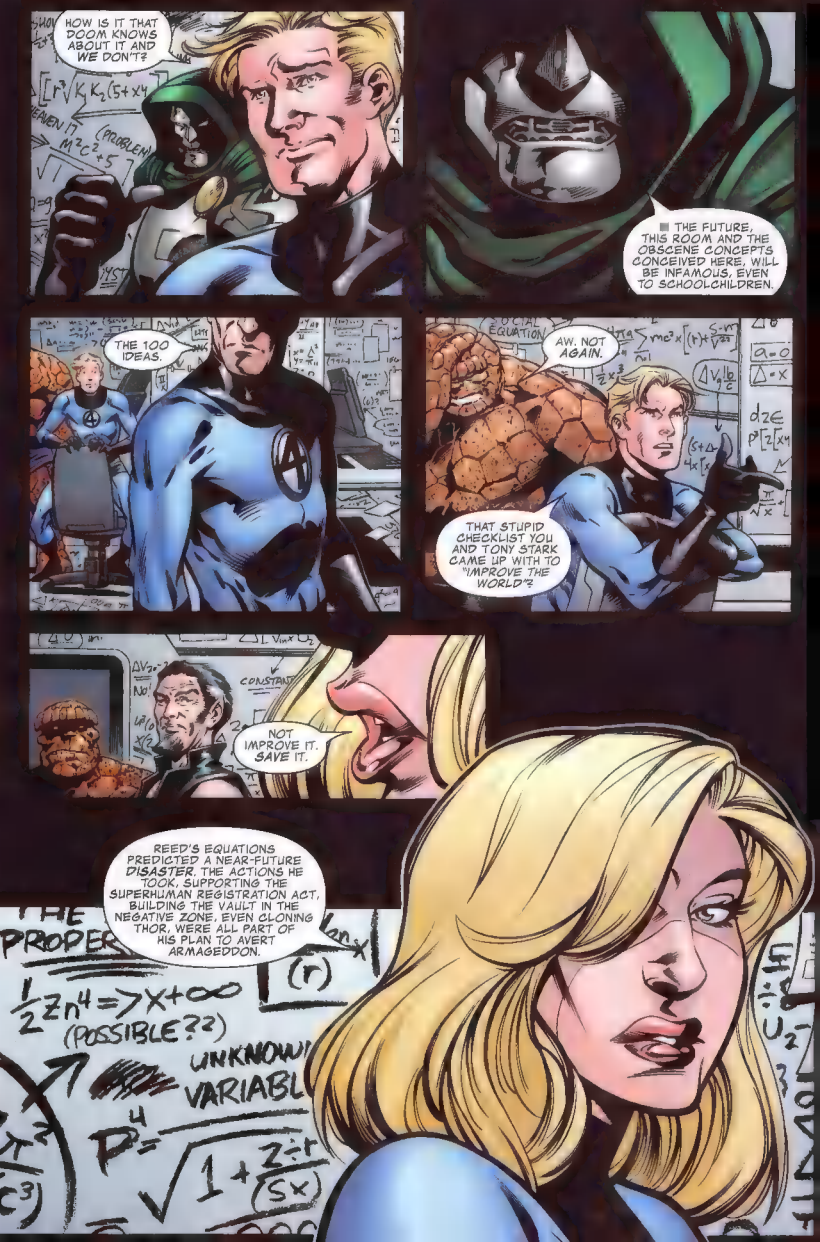

NO. I DON'T BELIEVE ANYTHING YOU SAY. EVER.
WE SHOULD HEAR HIM OUT. ON RAPPROCHEMENT DAY, HE WAS AS GOOD AS HIS WORD.

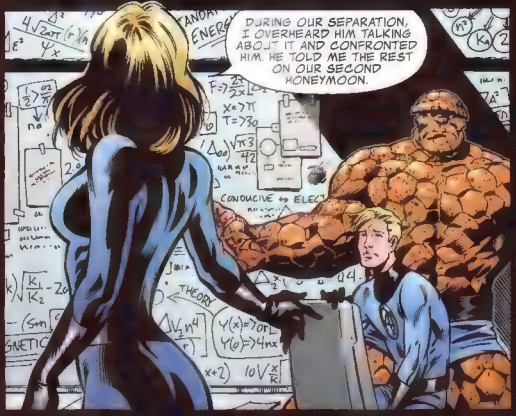
REED, I LOVE YOU BUT YOU ARE FAR TOO TRUSTING. THIS...CREATURE TOOK OUR SON. WE DON'T FORGIVE HIM BECAUSE HE WAS NICE TO YOU FOR AN HOUR ON HIS MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY.

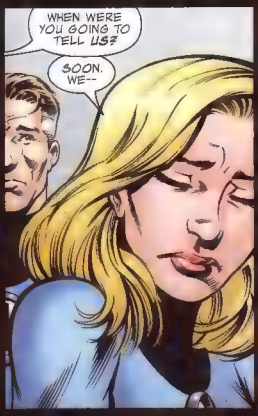
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT FROM DOOM. I WANT TO HEAR IT FROM YOU.
THERE IS NO EASY WAY TO SAY THIS
JUST HURRY UP AND SAY IT BEFORE WE ALL KEEL OVER FROM BOREDOM.
VERY WELL. AT GREAT RISK AND GREATER PERSONAL SACRIFICE, VICTOR DEFIED THE AUTHORITIES, ENLISTED T'CHALLA AND MYSELF AND THEN STOLE A TIME MACHINE--
I STOLE NOTHING. THAT MACHINE IS MINE.
--IN ORDER TO COME HERE AND SAVE THE WORLD.
OKAY, SO MUCH FOR ANY DANGER OF ME DOZING OFF.

SAVE THE WORLD FROM WHAT?
FROM YOU, OLD FRIEND.
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS. I WOULD NEVER--
WHAT ARE YOU CLAIMING I'VE DONE?
TIME TRAVEL, REMEMBER? IT'S NOT WHAT YOU'VE DONE--
--IT'S WHAT YOU'RE ABOUT TO DO.
ENOUGH OF THIS. WHICH WAY TO YOUR PRIVATE SANCTUARY, RICHARDS? THE EVIDENCE OF YOUR TREACHERY WILL BE FOUND THERE.

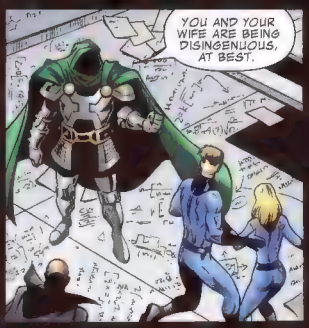
YOU KNOW, IF YOU'D ASKED, I'D HAVE BOUGHT YOU A NOTEBOOK.
IT HELPS ME TO HAVE MY IDEAS SPREAD OUT IN FRONT OF ME. IT HELPS ME SEE IT ALL.
HOW LONG HAS THIS ROOM BEEN HERE?
FROM THE BEGINNING. I'VE RARELY ALLOWED VISITORS HERE. EVEN YOU.


HOW IS IT THAT DOOM KNOWS ABOUT IT AND WE DON'T?
THE FUTURE, THIS ROOM AND THE OBSCENE CONCEPTS CONCEIVED HERE, WILL BE INFAMOUS, EVEN TO SCHOOLCHILDREN.
THE 100 IDEAS.
AW. NOT AGAIN.
THAT STUPID CHECKLIST YOU AND TONY STARK CAME UP WITH TO "IMPROVE THE WORLD"?
NOT IMPROVE IT. SAVE IT.
REED'S EQUATIONS PREDICTED A NEAR-FUTURE DISASTER. THE ACTIONS HE TOOK, SUPPORTING THE SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION ACT, BUILDING THE VAULT IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE, EVEN CLONING THOR, WERE ALL PART OF HIS PLAN TO AVERT ARMAGEDDON.


DURING OUR SEPARATION, I OVERHEARD HIM TALKING ABOUT IT AND CONFRONTED HIM. HE TOLD ME THE REST ON OUR SECOND HONEYMOON.


WHEN WERE YOU GOING TO TELL US?
SOON. WE--

I'D PLANNED TO TELL YOU RIGHT AFTER WE RETURNED FROM TITAN, BUT WE'VE BEEN ON THE RUN CONSTANTLY SINCE THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR ATTACKED.
TOO BUSY? THAT'S YOUR EXPLANATION?


YOU AND YOUR WIFE ARE BEING DISINGENUOUS, AT BEST.

THE "400 IDEAS" MAY HAVE, AS YOU CLAIM, AVERTED THE POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS SOCIETAL UPHEAVALS CAUSED BY THE GROWING FRICTION BETWEEN HUMAN- AND TRANSHUMANKIND.

BUT THAT WASN'T WHAT YOU WERE RELUCTANT TO TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT, WAS IT?

YOU AVOIDED THE CONVERSATION NOT BECAUSE YOU FEARED REVEALING THE SECRET HONOR IN YOUR PREVIOUS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 100 IDEAS.
RATHER, YOU FEARED THEIR REACTION TO YOUR CURRENT PLAN.
IDEA #101
DO I DARE?
NO. THAT'S NOT RIGHT. IT'S NOT THE WAY YOU'RE MAKING IT SEEM...
A HISTORY WE'VE COME HERE TO PREVENT EVER OCCURRING.
YOU NEEDN'T FEAR, RICHARDS. HISTORY SHOWS THAT YOUR FAMILY FULLY SUPPORTED YOUR MEGALOMANIA. YOU DID IMPLEMENT PLAN #101.
THE REST WAS HISTORY.

I USED TO WIPE THE FLOOR WITH THE LOT OF YA WHEN YOU WERE IN YER PRIME. IF YOU TAKE A STEP TOWARDS REED, I'LL REMIND YOU HOW IT USED TA GO.
CEASE YOUR PRATTLING. IF WE WERE HERE TO KILL REED RICHARDS, THE DEED WOULD ALREADY BE DONE.
VON DOOM'S EXCEEDINGLY POOR DIPLOMATIC SKILLS ASIDE, HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH.
WE'RE NOT HERE TO FIGHT YOU. WE'RE HERE TO CONVINCE YOU.
HISTORY SAYS YOU MAKE A DECISION TODAY. YOU ALL AGREE TO HELP REED IMPLEMENT HIS PLAN #101.
THAT DECISION TAKES THE WORLD DOWN A PATH THAT IS UNACCEPTABLE TO ME.

UNACCEPTABLE TO ALL OF US. TO YOU TOO, IF YOU FULLY UNDERSTOOD EVERYTHING THAT IS TO COME.
SO WE'VE COME HERE TO TELL YOU, IN THE HOPE THAT YOU'LL TURN BACK FROM THIS PATH.
SO WHAT'D WE DO THAT WAS SO BAD?
WHAT'S PLAN #101?
IT'S SIMPLE IN CONSTRUCTION, BUT FANTASTICALLY COMPLEX IN IMPLEMENTATION.
SIMPLY PUT, PLAN #101 IS "FIX EVERYTHING."

WHAT THE #@%* IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
END HUNGER, POVERTY, DISEASE AND WAR. INCREASE FREEDOM. MAXIMIZE POTENTIAL, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CHALLENGE AND ENRICH THE HUMAN SPIRIT.
IDEA #101
BACK IN COLLEGE, YOU USED TO TALK ABOUT THIS STUFF ALLA TIME. YOU WANT TO BUILD A UTOPIA.
I'M A BIT MORE PRACTICAL THAN I WAS IN THOSE DAYS. UTOPIA JUST ISN'T POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, IT IS WITHIN OUR POWERS TO CREATE A WORLD VASTLY PREFERABLE TO THE ONE WE LIVE IN NOW.
OR IS IT?

WHAT WENT WRONG? ARE MY CALCULATIONS OFF? SOME X-FACTOR THAT DIDN'T CANCEL ITSELF OUT AS I'D THEORIZED IT WOULD?
NO. YOUR CALCULATIONS WERE CORRECT.
THE INFORMATION REVOLUTION YOU BEGAN TRANSFORMED THE WORLD. YOU CURED DISEASE, ENDED WAR, CREATED SO MUCH WEALTH THAT WANT BECAME UNKNOWN AND GREED BECAME POINTLESS.
AND A GRATEFUL HUMANITY WORSHIPPED YOU.
WHICH I FOUND IRRITATING BUT NOT DANGEROUS. AT LEAST, NOT AT FIRST.
OVER TIME, HOWEVER, YOUR BEHAVIOR BECAME INCREASINGLY ERRATIC.
IN RETROSPECT, EVERYTHING WENT TO HELL WHEN SUE LEFT YOU FOR NAMOR.

I'M SORRY, REED. NEITHER OF US MEANT FOR IT TO HAPPEN.
AS YOUR GOOD WORKS MULTIPLIED, YOU BECAME INCREASINGLY DISTANT TOWARDS YOUR WIFE, SUE. TURNED TO ME, AT FIRST AS A FRIEND, BUT INEVITABLY, WE BECAME LOV--
I'VE HEARD ENOUGH.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO UPSET YOU, BUT YOU HAD TO KNOW THE TRUTH. THE STAKES ARE SO HIGH--
I CONCUR. FORTUNATELY, I'VE JUST NOW WORKED OUT THE ANSWER.
REED, DON'T--
URRGGG
PAH!

SEE? PROBLEM SOLVED.
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